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C.I.A. Will Not Prosecute Students Over Disclosures

Agency Is Reassuring

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 19—The

Central Intelligence Agency said today it was "inconceivable" that members of the National Student Association who disclosed their secret relationship with the C.I.A. would be prosecuted for their unauthorized revelations.

Lawrence R. Houston, general counsel of the C.I.A., disclosed in a telephone interview that "we have talked about that and there is to be no retribution, no prosecution."

In the past most C.I.A. officials have declined any comment to newsmen, but Mr. Houston made it clear today that he sought to reassure student association officers that there would be no criminal prosecution.

"These boys were driven into a corner where they had to say something," he said. He did not elaborate.

According to student officers, members of the association who knew of the C.I.A.'s financial support or who agreed to cooperate with the agency in collecting information abroad were required to sign a security agreement that firmly forbade any disclosures, intentionally or by "negligence."

The security oath, a copy of

which was obtained today from non-student sources, includes a warning that "intentional or negligent violation of this secrecy agreement may subject me to prosecution under the espionage laws of the United States of America."

Mr. Houston said: "The key word is 'may.' We would have to show intent to harm the United States by giving information to a foreign power. I don't think we could do that in this case."

He said that prosecution was "not at all automatic" in such cases.

The officers of the student association disclosed the C.I.A.'s 15-year covert relationship with their organization, in violation of the C.I.A. agreement, to persons who later revealed it to Ramparts magazine.

In a statement last Friday, Sam Brown, chairman of the

association's 10-member National Supervisory Board, said that some members and staff officials of the organization had been "trapped" into collecting "sensitive information" for the C.I.A. by a process that involved the security agreement and its implied threat of criminal prosecution for disclosure.

"Prior to establishing a relationship with a staff member," Mr. Brown's statement said, "the agency ran a security clearance on the individual and asked him to sign a national security agreement. Individuals who signed the oath were informed that violations of the oath could result in jail sentences of up to 20 years."

Mr. Houston, said today: "Of course, we don't like what has happened, and we certainly don't mean that the decision not to prosecute gives these people carte blanche to discuss anything further they may know that is of a confidential nature. There is some information we think they should plainly not discuss."